

JUN 24 2014

**MEMORANDUM**

**SUBJECT:** Acceptance of the Big River Master Plan - Final Draft, May 1, 2014, as the Final Deliverable under the Multi-County Cooperative Agreements

**FROM:** *fu* Jason Gunter, Preston Law and Greg Bach *gun*  
Remedial Project Managers, Special Emphasis Remedial Branch

**THRU:** Gene Gunn, Chief *gun*  
Special Emphasis Remedial Branch

**TO:** Big River Mine Tailings, Operable Unit 2, 07CR File  
Southwest Jefferson County Mine Site, Operable Unit 4, A7D2 File  
Washington County Lead District – Potosi Site, Operable Unit 4, A78D File  
Washington County Lead District – Old Mines Site, Operable Unit 4, A78K File  
Washington County Lead District – Richwoods Site, Operable Unit 4, A78N File


**Background:**

On May 2, 2014, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency received an email from the Washington County Clerk transmitting the Big River Watershed Master Plan - Final Draft (BRWMP - Final Draft), prepared on May 1, 2014, by URS Corporation for the Jefferson County Council, St. Francois County Commission and Washington County Commission. The BRWMP - Final Draft addresses previous comments from the EPA dated December 19, 2013, on the Big River Watershed – Master Planning Process: Interim Findings Report – Fall 2012 (Interim Report) and is accepted by the EPA as the final deliverable for each of the three separate county cooperative agreements.

While many of the EPA's comments on the Interim Report have been addressed in the BRWMP - Final Draft, much work still remains to develop a useful master plan. The Big River watershed master planning process was initially envisioned as being a three year project covering three tasks that would ultimately "...provide assistance in developing a meaningful planning process, establish mechanisms for data collection and dissemination of information... through a collaborative effort among the three counties to work with EPA and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources to enhance the cleanup process as well as provide for community involvement and outreach." The EPA appreciates the participation of the three county governments and involvement of the citizens that attended the multiple watershed meetings. The EPA has not begun the cleanup action decision phase on the river and

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floodplain and the master planning process has provided some information in support of developing river and floodplain response actions that could be protective of human health and the environment and integrated with current and future uses of the resource.

The BRWMP – Final Draft documents concerns expressed by the attendees at the master planning outreach meetings regarding any changes in use of the resource that would result from efforts by the EPA to address the mine waste contamination in the river system. These meetings also provided information on the functions of the river and floodplain, potential impacts of mining on the resource, and the EPA’s cleanup progress and decision making process. However, the BRWMP - Final Draft does not document the content of the presentations from the watershed meetings preventing residents who could not attend the meetings to benefit from the information. In addition, the master plan does not present processes or mechanisms to continue the outreach effort into the future or broaden public participation.

Several factors hindered the overall success of the master planning process.

- The scope of the resource being addressed by the master planning process is very large and includes over one hundred miles of rivers and streams and adjacent floodplains. The mine waste in the system has potentially impacted hundreds of individual landowners in the watershed using the river and floodplain in a variety of ways.
- The levels of interest and participation among residents of the counties in the outreach meetings and the planning process varied greatly and the withdrawal of Jefferson County from the process during the final year limited the scope of the input to the final report.
- The loss of the contractor supporting the process for the extension year when the final planning report was being developed.
- The presentations made by the various agencies at the watershed outreach meetings were not documented for use by individuals that did not participate in the outreach meetings.

Several positive outcomes resulted from the master planning process.

- Greater awareness of the need to map and document the uses of the Big River and its floodplain while identifying the nature and extent of the contamination is needed prior to developing a Superfund cleanup alternative.
- Landowners along Big River have contacted the EPA regarding current uses of the resource. These contacts have resulted in two treatability studies that are underway to address contaminated sediment transport during high flow conditions as well as a larger floodplain sampling effort aimed at identifying and confirming locations and extent of contamination within the watershed.
- Other initiatives are underway to address issues in the Big River watershed that will contribute to the goals of the master planning process. These initiatives include: Our Missouri Waters Initiative lead by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Urban Waters Federal Partnership lead by the EPA and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Missouri Lead Strategy lead by MDNR and the EPA with important participation from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Missouri Department of Conservation, and USACE.

## Conclusion:

While the master planning process has not met the primary objective of creating an ongoing planning process through this current effort, the process has been beneficial in increasing public awareness of the EPA's activities in southeast Missouri, providing important information to the public on the function of Big River, and providing a written record of comments and concerns from local residents attending the outreach meetings. This initial effort demonstrates that developing and implementing a master planning process for a watershed of the scope and diversity of the Big River watershed will ultimately require additional local participation and leadership from all levels of government.

During the Master Plan process, several other initiatives were continued or developed which have some similar components and overlapping goals. The existing BRWSMP - Final Draft can be incorporated into work products from the Our Missouri Waters Initiative, Urban Waters Federal Partnership and the Missouri Lead Strategy Group. These other initiatives have contributed heavily to the outreach and coordination of federal, state and local governments/agencies with communities impacted by lead contaminated materials. Collectively, these initiatives may provide the groundwork for continued work toward a meaningful planning process in southeast Missouri to include the Big River watershed.